

Technology & Language Learning

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FLAn: A FREE HYPERMEDIA EDITOR to CREATE FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING UNITS

Hypermedia annotation is a technique used to improve foreign language reading and vocabulary learning through glossing words and providing meanings in different contexts such as visual, textual or auditory and forms such as pictures, videos, sound and text (AbuSeileek, 2008). The results of the current studies conducted on the use of hypermedia annotation on reading and vocabulary learning show that the use of hypermedia annotation helps improve reading and vocabulary (AbuSeileek, 2008; Erçetin, 2010; Kılıçkaya & Krajka, 2010). The meta-analysis conducted by Slimmer (2002) shows the use of glosses significantly aid reading comprehension, although the effect was small. However, some studies show that hypermedia annotation is not beneficial on recall and vocabulary learning (Jacobs, Dufon, & Hong, 1994) and glossing may cause constant interruption of reading, thereby leading to problems in reading comprehension (Sakar & Erçetin, 2005). For further discussion of hypermedia annotation, readers can refer to the study conducted by AbuSeileek (2011).

Foreign Language Annotator (FLAn)

Glossing words is done via special software called multimedia editors. Foreign Language Annotator (FLAn), created by Thibeault (2011), is one of these multimedia editors. FLAn (Foreign Language Annotator), a free hypermedia editor that works on both Macs and PCs, allows instructors to turn static texts into dynamic learning units by attaching information to words and phrases. The information can include text-based information (translation, definition, comments, grammar notes, etc.), digital media (image, audio, and video) or web links. When students read the text in a FLAn unit and click on an unfamiliar word, they see various kinds of information about the word to facilitate comprehension. In addition, FLAn allows teachers to include relevant cultural information and Web links, a global translation, and links to global references such as an online dictionary, grammar review or verb conjugator. Online quizzes and activities based on the text can also be linked directly to the FLAn unit. FLAn includes a tracking feature that allows the instructor to see a record of the student's performance. The record can be printed out or

sent as a text file through email. Both the text and glossary can be printed out as well. *FLAn* is particularly suited for in depth processing of shorter texts such as dialogs, transcripts of short audio or video clips, jokes, poems, song lyrics, and literary passages.

Getting started

FLAn, updated on September 15, 2011, can be downloaded through the following link (<http://www.redhotwords.com/downloads.html>). The PC version is around 8 MB and can be used without installation. After the download is finished, unzip it and follow the following steps:

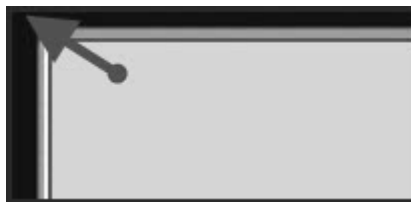
1. Open the FLAn folder and run the file double-clicking on the file "FLAn".
2. When FLAn runs, the following screen will appear (Figure 1).



3. You can either click on NEW to create a unit or OPEN a unit that has been already created. Since we are going to create a unit, we will click on "NEW" and provide a file name for the unit. Then, the following screen will appear (Figure 2).



This screen is actually what the learners will see after the unit is created. First, we have to move to EDIT MODE. Using this mode, we will insert the text and start glossing. In order to start EDIT MODE, hold down the ALT (PC) or OPTION (Mac) key and click on the top invisible button in the upper left corner of the window (Figure 3).



When you move your mouse to the corner, you will see the date of the update with the message “This unit created with FLAn, Copyright 2006-2011 by Thom Thibeault.” A password will be asked for, which is “CALL” or “call” and can be changed in the EDIT MODE.

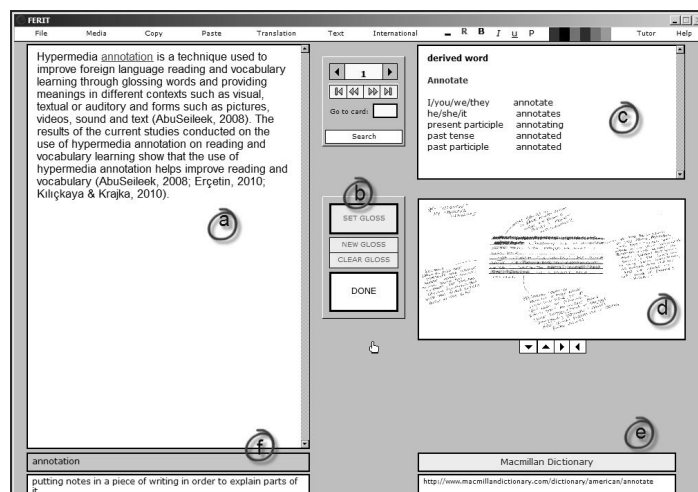
4. In the EDIT MODE, the following menu tab will appear at the top of the screen. Holding down the ALT (PC) or OPTION (Mac) key and clicking on the items, you can access help.



- Text : to change font and size
- File : to save, save as or import the text
- Tools : to paste, edit text or change the password
- Glosses : to gloss or edit glossary
- Media : to add images (JPG, PNG, GIF), videos (QuickTime compatible- MOV, MPEG, MP or audio files4) or audio files (MP3, MOV, WAV) QuickTime is required to play the media files (<http://www.apple.com/quicktime/download/>)
- Info : to provide cultural information, translation of the text and references
- International : to insert international characters
- Tutor : to watch the tutorial videos

5. First, we will add a short text. We can do it in two ways. In the first, we can copy a text and paste it into the text area. The second way is preferable, especially if the text is composed of non-Latin characters. Copy the text and save it as PLAIN TEXT. While saving in Notepad (PC) or TextEdit (Mac), do not forget to choose UNICODE (UTF-8). Then, using the FILE >IMPORT on the menu tab, you can import the text into text area.

6. Now we will start glossing. Click on the GLOSSES >GLOSS A new screen will appear, with our text on the left (a) (Figure 5). A word of caution is due here. If you decide to change the text after you have finished glossing, you will have to redo the glossing.



Click on the word that you would like to gloss. It will turn red and be underlined. In (b), click on SET GLOSS. Then, provide any grammatical information in the (c) column. In (d), you can add an image, video or a sound file for the glossed word using the MEDIA on the toolbar. In (e) you can add links to online dictionaries such as Macmillan (<http://www.macmillan-dictionary.com/>) or online verb conjugators such as Verbix (<http://www.verbix.com/languages/>). In (f), you can provide the definitions either in learners' L1 or the target language. In order to gloss another word, click on NEW GLOSS in (b) and follow the same steps.

7. To provide extra materials and translation of the text in learners' L1, the INFO on the menu tab is available. When you click on the INFO, the following options appear:

Translation : to provide a translation of the text in learners' L1

Culture : to provide information and web links about the culture

Reference : to provide further links on grammar or vocabulary.

Quizzes: : to provide links on online quizzes and exercises. Quizzes or exercises available on the web can be used. However, you can also create your own online quizzes using freely available tools on the net such as Quizstar (Kılıçkaya, 2010).

Credits : to provide information about the person or people who created the unit and who helped.

8. In order to add media file to the text, on the main screen, we will click on MEDIA and then choose TEXT AUDIO or VIDEO. Please do not forget that the media files should be copied to the corresponding folder, i.e. images to FLAn_Images.

9. Finally, when all the editing, glossing and adding media files are finished, click FILE > EXIT EDIT on the menu bar. On the next screen, we will see the unit the way the learners will see it. Please remember to save your work from time to time while you are working on your unit and keep each unit in its own folder and the media files in their respective folders (FLAn_Images, FLAn_Audio, FLAn_Video). Before creating a new unit, make a copy of the downloaded FLAn folder and rename it with the title of your unit without spaces.

This is a very quick introduction to FLAn. Please refer to the manual published by Redhotwords.com (2011) for detailed discussion of FLAn.

Evaluation

FLAn, without requiring any installation or programming skills, is a nice tool for language teachers to create hypermedia units with glossing features supported by images, animations, audio and video files to reinforce learners' comprehension of reading and vocabulary acquisition. Learners can work with the created unit at their own pace and independently. However, the preparation of the units will require detailed planning and organization, not to mention the time. Therefore, the success of the created units will depend on language teachers' efforts and enthusiasm.

How to use FLAn with language learners

Language teachers can assign the units as homework or practice outside the classroom. They can create units based on short texts such as poems, dialogues or lyrics. The texts should be short enough to allow learners to have a deeper understanding,

rather than lengthy ones. For beginner learners to feel safe, teachers can gloss every word; however, with advanced learners, texts can be longer and the number of glossed words can be lower.

References

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Resources

The training materials and a very detailed manual
<http://www.redhotwords.com/authors.html>
http://www.redhotwords.com/docs/FLAn_Manual.pdf

Video clips on FLAn

<http://redhotwords.com/TutorVideos/BeforeYouStart.mov>
<http://redhotwords.com/TutorVideos/prepareNewUnit.mov>
<http://redhotwords.com/TutorVideos/createNewUnit.mov>
<http://redhotwords.com/TutorVideos/EnterEditMode.mov>

Free public domain media

<http://www.freestockphotos.com>
<http://www.cryer.co.uk/resources/clipart.htm>
<http://www.free-animations.co.uk/>

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